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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: SULTAN'S SUMMER TRAVELS, GCC SUMMIT AND FTA

REF: A. MUSCAT 616
[1](#)B. MUSCAT 572
[1](#)C. MUSCAT 344
[1](#)D. MUSCAT 309

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Gary A. Grappo per 1.5 (B and D
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Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Receiving the Ambassador at his residence August 31, Sultan Qaboos' Advisor for External Liaison, Dr. Omar Zawawi, reviewed the Sultan's recent official/private trip through the Middle East and Europe, reaffirmed the Sultan's commitment to implementing quickly the U.S.-Oman FTA, and briefly commented on the GCC Summit to be hosted by Oman in late November. Zawawi's comments regarding trafficking in persons are reported septel. End Summary.

Libya Stop Highlighted Summer Travel

[1](#)2. (C) The Sultan's three-and-one-half month summer travels (ref C) included official stops in the UAE, Egypt, Libya, Jordan and Qatar. His nearly month-long stay in the UK included a private dinner with the Queen and separate meetings with the prime minister and defense and foreign ministers. He made private stops, usually aboard his new yacht, the Al Sa'id, in Italy, France and Egypt.

[1](#)3. (C) However, per Zawawi, who accompanied Qaboos throughout most of his travels, the stop that intrigued and challenged the Sultan's staff most and attracted the most attention back home was the Sultan's two-day visit to Tripoli (ref B). It was Qaboos' first visit to Libya in 35 years. He said that the Libyans had pressed Qaboos "relentlessly" for a visit for the past two years and especially upon learning of his expected presence in the Mediterranean during the summer.

[1](#)4. (C) Zawawi acknowledged that Libyan President Qadhafi is "a very different kind of leader" than the Sultan, remarking offhandedly, "He's just strange." Nevertheless, he claimed the encounter was valuable to the Sultan in understanding one of the region's more high profile leaders. Avoiding specifics of matters discussed, Zawawi allowed that the Libyans appeared to be concentrating much more on their relations with African countries as opposed to the Arabs and that Qadhafi's advisors and cabinet appeared "totally submissive" to the president.

GCC Summit a Priority

[1](#)5. (C) Dr. Zawawi confirmed there was intense focus on preparing for the late November GCC Summit in Muscat. (Note: Muscat was to host last year's summit but was forced to surrender the chair to Qatar following the June 2007 cyclone, whose flooding and destruction set back by nearly a year the government's remodeling project of the Al Bustan Hotel, where the summit takes place.)

¶6. (C) Zawawi chuckled at the Ambassador's reference to a recent Iranian media report that President Ahmadi-Nejad would be invited to the Muscat summit. "Everyone wants to be invited to the ball," he joked, but the Sultan has made no decision to issue invitations outside the GCC. He is a firm adherent to the view that this is a GCC affair, said Zawawi, and although not necessarily opposed to including a head of state on an exceptional basis, it should not be common practice. In any event, the matter has not been raised and Sultan Qaboos would always consult his GCC counterparts before acting.

Committed to Quick FTA Implementation

¶7. (C) The Ambassador expressed his gratitude for the Sultan's quick action after his meeting with the Sultan last spring (ref D) to break the logjam on two important pieces of legislation necessary for FTA implementation. He further briefed Zawawi on what appeared to be the last remaining major hurdle in the way of FTA implementation, i.e., telecommunications licensing fees and procedures (ref A). (Note: A copy of the Ambassador's recent letter on this matter to the administrator of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority had previously been provided to Zawawi.) The Ambassador summarized U.S. concerns and promised to keep Zawawi apprised as we moved forward. Dr. Zawawi took careful notes and asked to be advised quickly should a problem develop. He reaffirmed the Sultan's intention to "get this done" as soon as possible.
GRAPPO